

Chapter 1

Sirius Black leaned back in his seat, smiling down at the baby he held in his arms. He could hardly believe the events of the previous 24 hours, and yet, as he rocked baby Harry to sleep, he could not deny the truth any more. James Potter - his best friend for ten years, was dead, along with his wife Lily. Only their infant son Harry Potter had survived - the infant that Sirius now cradled in his arms.

He knew the rest of the wizarding world was celebrating, but he could not find it in his heart to join them. The Wizarding Wireless Network was broadcasting the news far and wide : Lord Voldemort - the most evil Dark Lord in recent history - was dead. His reign of terror that had lasted eleven years was ended by the most unlikely person - Harry Potter, the infant son of his friend. No one knew how or why it had happened, but after Voldemort had killed both James and Lily with barely a second thought, his final curse rebounded from Harry, struck him and... all that was left was his wand and robes, lying on the floor of Harry's room. The magical world, after living so long under the threat of death and torture, was celebrating their freedom.

But as Sirius thought about his friends, tears rolled down his cheeks. In one night he had not only lost his best friend and a woman he considered a sister, but he knew that another of his best friends - a man named Peter Pettigrew - had betrayed him. Betrayed him, James, Lily and the whole of the magical world. James and Lily had gone in to hiding the week before, using a powerful charm to protect them and their child. It would keep their location a secret from everyone, as long as the person who held the secret didn't tell anyone.

At the time picking Peter had seemed like a great idea - no one would suspect little Peter of being the protector of one of the most hunted family in the wizarding world. While Sirius would go around the country, pretending to be hiding from Voldemort, Peter would retire to some out of the way place, and hold the secret until the end of the war.

But when he had heard the news of the fall of Godric's Hollow - when he had found out James and Lily had been murdered - he knew there was only one way it could have happened.

"Damn you Peter" He said to himself "And damn me too"

Albus Dumbledore was also mourning the loss of two of his favourite students. The news of James and Lily's death had hit him hard, but he knew that he had to look after Harry now - the "boy who lived" had an important role to play in the future, and it was important he was raised somewhere safe and out of the limelight.

He turned and saw a small gray cat sat on a garden wall. A moment later the cat transformed in to an elderly witch - Minerva McGonagall - deputy headmistress of Hogwarts School and his friend and confident for nearly thirty years.

"Is it true"

"Yes Minerva, I am afraid it is"

"James and Lily"

"Both dead"

"What of Harry"

"He survived, though no one knows how. I have sent Hagrid to bring him here" He indicated the house they were stood opposite - Number 4, Privet Drive.

"But Albus - they are the most appalling muggles. Are you sure he has to come here"

"His name will be known throughout the magical world - he needs to be raised away from that world, so he can grow up a normal boy"

"I suppose so" She paused for a moment "Are you sure Hagrid"

"He has my complete confidence Minerva" Dumbledore said "He will protect the boy with his life"

They stood together, in silence, for a moment, then turned as they heard the sound of a motorbike. They watched as it descended, and came to a halt next to them. Riding it was the massive form of Rubeus Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, but he was alone.

"Hagrid, where is Harry?" Dumbledore asked gently.

Sirius put Harry to bed - he had a cot in his room for the odd time he had looked after Harry while Lily and James had gone out on the town - and realised how much his life was going to change. In a few short hours he had gone from a key player in the war against Voldemort to the most hated person in the world - a traitor who betrayed his best friends to their worst enemy.

And from being a young, single guy with no responsibilities, he was now the surrogate father to the hero of the wizarding world.

And he knew just how close he had been to losing Harry forever.

(flashback - six hours before)

He was out at a pub in Diagon Alley, doing reconnaissance work for The Order. He had been keeping watch over a few of the people they suspected were Voldemort sympathisers, but who had not yet graduated to being Death Eaters. But the night had been uneventful - he had seen one or two people he recognised, but they were just going about their business.

He decided to call it quits, and then went to visit Lily and James. They had been in hiding for a week, and Sirius guessed they could do with seeing a friendly face. He flooed to the The Three Broomsticks, then almost at once to an out of the way pub in Ireland, then he tried to floo to the Potter's house, but the fire had refused to light. He tried again, and got the same results.

Starting to panic, he returned to The Three Broomsticks, and tried a third time, still with the same result. So he flooed back to the first pub he had been in, and then left to pick up his motor-cycle. He knew he should have checked in with The Order, but something told him that time was of the essence.

An hour later he flew over The Potter's house, and his heart dropped in to his boots. The house was a wreck - a fire was burning at the back, and there were massive holes in the roof from spell damage. As he turned the bike back, he had seen Hagrid exiting the ruined house, carrying a small bundle. Suddenly his heart jumped in to his mouth - could Harry be alive?

He landed, and run over to Hagrid.

"He's... he's alive?" He asked.

"Aye, but Merlin only knows 'ow" Hagrid had replied. He twitched the blanket aside and Sirius saw a small scar above Harry's eyebrow.

"Where are you taking him?" Sirius asked.

"Dumbledore gave me instructions. Said I was to take 'im to 'is aunt's"

"His aunt... Lily's sister?" Sirius fumbled around for the name for a moment, then added "Petunia"

"That's 'er"

"But... Lily hated her sister. And her sister hated her. Why would Dumbledore want to send him there?" Sirius thought for a moment
"No - he can't be"

"I should be going - Dumbledore's waitin' for me" Hagrid said.

"Did you ever meet Lily's sister"

"Don't know that I did"

"She hated Lily because she was a witch. She hates everything to do with magic. And her husband is no better - he hated magic even more"

than she does" Sirius looked up at the grounds keeper "Let me take him"

"But Dumbledore said"

"Dumbledore doesn't know Petunia Dursley like I do, Hagrid. And besides, James asked me to be Harry's godfather - to look after him if James..." His voice cracked as he thought about James being dead.

"But..." Hagrid started, but Sirius interrupted him.

"If Harry goes to live with Lily's sister, he will be hated there. Do you really want that for him?" Sirius asked. Hagrid paused for a moment, then seemed to reach a decision. He handed Harry over to Sirius, then turned to go back the house.

"I should get James'n'Lily..." He said, but Sirius shook his head.

"Go to Dumbledore like you arranged" He looked around and saw his bike "Take my motorcycle and go" He turned and started to walk away, but Hagrid's voice stopped him.

"Won't you be needing your bike"

"Better if I don't" Sirius said, glancing around "Too easy to find me. I think I am going to have to disappear for a while - just until things die down" With that, he walked out to the edge of the anti-apparition wards, and, taking a last look at his friends' house, he vanished.

(end of flashback)

He shook his head - if Harry had gone to Petunia and Vernon Dursley, Sirius knew that he would have grown up in misery. He had met Petunia once - at Lily's wedding. The woman had spent the entire time looking at everyone with contempt, and had left as soon as she could. If she had got her claws in to Harry then who knows how he would have turned out.

"Hagrid, where is Harry?" Dumbledore asked gently.

"I gave 'im to Sirius, Professor" Hagrid replied, sounding uncertain.

"Sirius Black?" McGonagall and Dumbledore replied in surprise.

"Turned up just as I was leaving, an' said 'e would look after 'im" His gaze flicked between the two of them "Said it's what James woulda wanted"

Dumbledore looked over at McGonagall, the shock evident in his eyes.

"Did he say where he was going?" McGonagall asked.

"Said 'e was goin' to disappear for a while" Hagrid replied, starting to worry about the questions "I did right, didn't I"

Dumbledore glanced across at McGonagall again, then nodded.

"You did right Hagrid, it's what James would have wanted" He heard McGonagall sniff "Now - why don't you return to Hogwats. Professor McGonagall and I will be there shortly"

"Right you are" Hagrid said, then he got on to the motorcycle, and rode off. Dumbledore watched him go, then turned to his long time friend.

"We have to alert the rest of The Order, Minerva. We have to find Harry before Black can do anything to him"

Molly Weasley smiled at her husband Arthur as he held Ginny, their youngest child. He had come home from work early - most of The Ministry was celebrating the downfall of Voldemort - and had spent the afternoon playing with their children. Molly had not known the Potters all that well, and although she felt sorry that they had died, the fact her children could now grow up and to go school in a much safer world.

She was thinking about making tea, when their fireplace flared in to life. A moment later she jumped to her feet as Professor Dumbledore stepped out of the flames and walked over to them.

"Arthur. Molly. I am sorry to intrude at this time, but I need your help"

Dumbledore said quickly.

"Why?" Arthur asked.

"You know about The Potters?" He asked.

"A very bad business" Molly said "But how can we help them now"

"I asked Hagrid to get Harry from the ruins - I thought he should stay with his mother's sister" Dumbledore said softly "But as he was doing it, Sirius Black arrived. And Hagrid gave Harry to him, because Sirius told him it was what James would have wanted"

"But James loved Sirius like a brother" Arthur said "Surely Harry would be better off with his godfather than strangers..." He trailed off as he saw the look in Dumbledore's eyes "Albus"

"It was Sirius that betrayed them Arthur. Sirius was their secret keeper, and he told Voldemort where to find them"

"No!" Arthur gasped in shock.

"And now he has Harry, and Merlin only knows what he will do with him"

"What can we do?" Arthur asked, handing Ginny to a still shocked Molly.

"I am calling The Order together, and we have to try to find Harry as soon as possible" Dumbledore turned to Molly "I am sorry to take your husband away from you on this glorious day, but it is imperative that we find Harry and Sirius, and we will need all the help we can get"

"I will return when I can, Molly" Arthur said, kissing his wife on the cheek, then following Dumbledore to the floo. Molly watched them leave, then looked down at her daughter, still asleep. Suddenly the world did not seem as happy as it had five minutes before.

Sirius leaned back in his chair and watched Harry sleep. He thought about the future - they would have to live in hiding, at least for a while. Harry would not understand why he had to keep their secrets - how do you explain to a three year old child the need to lie about his godfather raising him? And even then he would have to go out to get food, and to keep up with events in the wizarding world. Maybe a disguise?

For a moment he thought about leaving Harry at Hogwarts - he knew he could get in and out without being found - and letting Dumbledore decide Harry's future. But James and Lily had named him Harry's godfather, and he owed it to them to raise Harry the way they would have wanted.

The celebrations that had started early that morning continued throughout the night. All over the country wizards and witches were having their first taste in a very long time of a life free from fear. And all over the country they toasted Harry Potter - The Boy Who Lived, not knowing that in a few short days their celebrations would be muted, and The Boy Who Lived would become known as The Boy Who Vanished.

But Harry, unaware of his role in history, slept peacefully on.

Chapter 2

Sirius watched Harry packing his bag, and could not help smiling. His godson seemed excited about going to school, even if it wasn't the school he had hoped for.

Six years before, when he had rescued Harry from the wreck of his parents' house, Sirius had realised that they would have to live in hiding for a while. He couldn't be seen by anyone in the wizarding world - a few days after James and Lily were killed The Daily Prophet headlines made it very clear that everyone thought he was the traitor and that Millicent Bagnold had given permission for the Dementors to kiss him on sight, and Aurors to bring him in "dead or alive".

He knew he could disguise himself, either with a glamour or muggle hair dye, so he could go out once in a while to pick up food and other supplies.

But Harry was a whole other matter. The scar on his forehead made him instantly recognisable, and little kids were not known for keeping secrets all that well. Sirius himself was an occlumens - as part of his work for The Order it was a necessity - but Harry's mind was as easy to read as a first year spell book. So either he had to lie to Harry about who he was, or not allow Harry to interact with the wizarding world until he could learn to protect his mind. It was not a choice he was looking forward to.

In the end he had decided on a compromise. He kept Harry within the grounds of his house until he was seven, and then, on his seventh birthday, told him about his parents, his history and his future.

(flashback)

"So - I have to pretend to be someone else"

"Yes"

"And you have to pretend to be someone else"

"Yes. Two people actually"

"And this is because my parents were killed, and everybody thinks you did it"

"Yes Harry"

(end of flashback)

He had been surprised at how well Harry had taken it. There had been a lot of explanations, but very little of the tantrums he had expected. His godson had simply accepted it, then asked more questions about the disguise - if he could pick his hair colour, if he could do magic, if Sirius could do magic and if he could go to school.

That had been six weeks before, and since both Harry and Sirius were now under a disguise, they had been out and about in the neighbourhood. Sometimes Harry, or Aaron as he was now known, wandered around with his dog, Lucky, and sometimes he was out shopping with his Uncle Rupert. They were making a lot of friends in the area, including a lot of kids that Harry would be going to school with in a few days.

He had also started teaching Harry some magic, including occlumency. And that was where the first problem had occurred.

(flashback)

"Harry, can you come here for a moment"

"Yes Uncle" Harry turned away from his desk and came and sat down by Sirius. He had started calling him Uncle on his birthday, rather than Sirius, so he would get used to doing it in public.

"Do you remember me telling you about Hogwarts"

"The school for magic? The one my parents went to?" Harry looked interested.

"And you know you are going there when you finish this school"

"Yes"

"And you know I told you that a lot of people want to find me, because they think I did something wrong"

"But it was that Peter person you told me about"

"But they don't know it, and they want to find me and talk to me"

"You said they wanted to take you away" Harry said.

"Okay - they want to take me away. And I want to stay here with you" Sirius said, smiling at his godson's memory.

"I want you to stay here too" Harry replied, then moved over and hugged him. Sirius held him for a moment, then sat back.

"I need to show you how to stop people reading your mind, so that if anyone does they won't find out about our secrets"

"Another spell?" Harry sat up straight, looking eager.

"Not exactly" Sirius couldn't help chuckling as Harry's face fell "It is a spell, but it takes a bit more work than the ones I showed you last week" He took a deep breath, then started to explain occlumency.

(end flashback)

Molly looked over at her sons and decided she liked having a big family. Sometimes it was a problem - usually because of the money - but having seven children was truly a blessing, and she would not change them for anything. In less than a week, her third child (Percy) would be starting at school, and would have his two older brothers to keep him company (and stop him from getting in to trouble), but she would still have four children at home. She was really dreading the day when Ginny departed for Hogwarts and she would be alone in the house again - a situation that hadn't happened in more than fifteen years. Her husband had suggested she could return to her studies - she had been a better than average potions maker while she was in school, but she wasn't sure that, after more than twenty

years, she would be able to return to the field without a lot of problems.

She looked up as Arthur came in to the room, then looked back at her children, playing happily. Yes - she was blessed.

Dumbledore was walking through the halls of Hogwarts, heading towards his office. His brother Abe had sent an owl to him earlier, saying he had information about Harry Potter. Albus hoped it was good news, but after six years of looking for the boy, he had more or less given up hope of ever finding him alive. After Sirius had betrayed James and Lily, and sided with Voldemort, he had vanished completely.

Dumbledore had used all of his influence and his contacts to try to find where Black was hiding, but it was as if he had fallen off the face of the earth. He had talked to some of his former students, who now worked for The Ministry, and had got a list of all the unplottable locations in the country. Then he had sent members of The Order to each of them, to see if they could see any sign of Black hiding. No one had seen anything about Harry or Black, although Dumbledore had been able to furnish The Ministry with the names of five or six former death eaters who were hiding out after the fall of Voldemort.

He gave the password, and walked up to his office. Aberforth was already there, along with another Order member named Kingsley. His hopeful mood was dashed as he took a look at their faces.

"Albus"

"Abe. Kingsley. Lemon drop"

"Thank you" Abe said, taking one of the sweets. Kingsley shook his head, and all three of them sat down "Albus - I think we have to stop looking for him"

"Why?" Albus asked, surprised.

"We haven't found anything in six years Albus. They might have left the country. They might be hiding somewhere we haven't thought of. They might be..." Abe replied.

"They might be dead" Kingsley said quietly.

"Do you really think so?" Albus asked.

"Black was a big supporter of You Know Who" Kingsley replied "After Harry got rid of Him, Black might have wanted revenge. Or maybe he thought that by killing Harry he could bring his Lord back"

"So you really think he could be dead?" Albus asked softly.

"Six years without a trace. We have searched most of the country twice, including the Black house and the area around Godric's Hollow. If Black were totally innocent, and wanted to protect Harry, he would have come to us, or The Ministry by now. So yes - I think Harry is dead" He and Albus shared a look, then the Headmaster turned to Kingsley.

"Thank you for coming in Kingsley. I will let you know when the next Order meeting is, though I suspect it won't be for some time" Kingsley stood up, slightly shocked at the dismissal, but nodded, then turned and walked out of the room. After he had left, Dumbledore turned back to his brother.

"So what do you think this means for the Prophecy?" Albus asked his brother.

"Either must die at the hand of the other" Abe replied, then smiled "If Black has killed Harry, then it means that Harry must have killed You Know Who" Dumbledore smiled.

"I think I will talk to The Minister about this. I won't mention The Prophecy of course, but just drop some hints"

"And about Harry?" Abe asked carefully. Dumbledore paused for a moment, then shook his head.

"I don't think we should tell them just yet. I think it best that we don't ruin the celebrations that the announcement about You Know Who will make"

"If you think it's best Albus, but you know the news will come out eventually. Surely it would be wiser to control it"

"Perhaps you are right, but for now I think we will keep it between us - just The Order"

That night Harry found it difficult to get to sleep. He started school the next day, and he had packed and repacked his bag five times that afternoon, and eventually Sirius had sent him to bed to stop him bouncing around the room for the rest of the night.

Sirius came in and looked down at his godson and smiled. He remembered being this excited about going off to Hogwarts, and could hardly blame Harry for being excited.

"Go to sleep Aaron" He said, trying to sound fatherly.

"I want to be awake for school" Harry replied, sitting up.

"School will still be there in the morning Aaron, and it won't come any sooner for staying awake"

"Okay" Sirius could not keep from laughing. How was it that every child ended up developing the perfect whine? He leaned over and tucked Harry in, then he gently started to probe Harry's mind. He had only been teaching him occlumency for two weeks, and, unsurprisingly, Harry was at a very early stage. But Sirius could not resist a smile at what he saw inside his godson's mind - the image of a library, with rows of shelves as far as the eye could see. He knew if he wanted he could go and open up any of the books - dive in to Harry's memories - but that wasn't what he was testing.

He pulled the blanket up over Harry, then turned and left the room. With one last look at the sleeping Harry, he went downstairs.

"Tomorrow will be a big day" He thought "Lets hope nothing goes wrong"

"Aaron, wake up"

"Don't want to"

"Okay. Stay in bed and miss your first day at school"

There was a pause, during which Sirius kept his face perfectly still. Then he broke in to a smile as Harry jumped out of bed and ran up to him.

"Okay - go have your shower, and then I will walk you to school"

"Okay!" Harry bounced off to the shower, leaving a grinning Sirius in his wake.

Half an hour later, Rupert Goldman and Aaron White were walking along the road to St. Juliet's where Harry was going to start school.

"So - you remember what I told you"

"Don't play with your wand when you aren't awake?" Harry said with a mischievous grin.

"No, but that's still good advice"

"Oh - you mean play nice with the other kids, don't forget that you are Rupert and I am Aaron and that I am not a wizard but just a normal boy"

"That's pretty much it. Oh - and try not to prank anyone if you think you are going to get caught" Sirius said with a smile, causing Harry to laugh.

They arrived at the gates, where Harry gave Sirius a quick hug, then turned and walked in to the playground. As he walked through the gates he realised it was the first time in six years that he wouldn't be

spending the day with Sirius. He turned back and watched his godfather walk away, and felt a slight ache in his heart.

He was just deciding whether or not he would stay, or run back to his home and skip school altogether, when he saw someone run past him. A girl of about his age with a lot of bushy brown hair and an interesting smile. She didn't stop, and he watched her go up the path. He had no idea who she was, but decided that school might not be so bad after all.

Chapter 3

Sirius arrived home half an hour after he had dropped off Harry at school, and suddenly realised he would have the whole day to himself - Harry would not be back until around three in the afternoon. He realised that he didn't know what to do with himself - he hadn't had this much free time during the day in as long as he could remember.

He looked around, and realised he actually had nothing to do. So he sat down, and picked up a copy of The Daily Prophet.

"Welcome class. I am Miss Pendleton. I know most of you came up from the previous year, but we have two new students joining us today" She looked over at Harry, then at the girl that Harry had seen earlier "Would you like to introduce yourselves"

Harry looked across at the girl, who was looking at across at him. He smiled at her, and pointed towards himself. She nodded eagerly - and, he had to admit, she reminded him of a chipmunk when she did - so he stood up.

"My name is Aaron Brown. I moved here six weeks ago with my uncle Rupert. I like playing chess, reading and playing with my dog Lucky"

"Where did you move from?" The teacher asked.

"From Miami, Florida" He replied, repeating the story that Sirius had told him to tell.

"Why did you move here?" One of the other kids asked. Harry looked at him, then looked up at the teacher.

"My uncle had to move for a job" This was one of the two answers they had made up. The other one was about his parents, Aaron's parents, being killed in a chemical fire, but he didn't think that was a good idea to say in class.

"Any other questions?" Miss Pendleton asked. When there was no response, she continued "Thank you Aaron. Miss Granger?" Harry watched as the girl with the brown hair stood up, took a deep breath and started talking.

"My name is Hermione Granger. My parents and I just moved here from Harlow in Essex, because my parents have opened up a dental practice in the area. I am named after a character in A Winter's Tale, and I think Shakespeare is the best writer I have read. Like Aaron, I like reading, but I don't play chess all that well and I haven't got a dog, though I do have a cat named Pixie"

Harry could not quite believe she had got all that out in one breath, but she just stood there, waiting for questions. He looked around, but no one was asking questions. Hermione was looking more and more embarrassed, so he asked the first question that came to mind.

"So what's Hermione like in The Winter's Tale?" He asked. He thought he was being helpful, but if anything Hermione went even more red. He looked over at his teacher who was smiling a little, so he looked back at Hermione "What colour is your cat?" He could almost see the stress draining out of the girl, and gave her a quick smile.

"Ginger, with a touch of brown"

"Any more questions?" His teacher asked, then when everyone remained quiet, she said "Okay. Can everyone get out their books, and we will sort out your timetables"

Molly Weasley looked over her children and decided she liked teaching. She only really taught her own kids, though sometimes Luna Lovegood came over from her parents' house for the odd lesson.

Today she was just teaching her four youngest - Fred and George (twins), Ronald (who hated to be called anything other than Ron) and Ginevra (who would happily hex anyone except her parents who didn't call her Ginny).

She had just finished the basics of cleaning charms when an owl arrived, carrying The Daily Prophet.

"Okay - break time" She sent the four kids out to play, and sat down to read through the paper. But almost at once she jumped up again and gave a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Mum?" "You okay?" Voices came from outside, and she saw her kids running back in.

"Sorry for scaring you kids" She said calmly, but Ginny looked at her, then pulled the paper out of her hands and began to read out loud.

"The Boy Who Lived No More" She paused, then continued "Harry Potter - also known as The Boy Who Lived - has been declared dead by The Ministry For Magic. Little Harry was kidnapped by Sirius Black (for a full profile of the traitorous Black, see pages 3, 4 and 5) after the confrontation with You Know Who (see pages 6 and 7 for further details). In a ceremony tomorrow, Harry Potter will be awarded the Wand Of Merit, posthumously, for his services to our people, and his name will be placed on our wall of the honoured dead" Ginny looked up at her mother "Mum"

"Yes Ginny - it's true. Professor Dumbledore came by to tell your father last night - he knew James a little"

"But..." Ginny's eyes dropped to the ground, then she stood up and ran out of the room. Molly turned and looked at her three sons questioningly.

"You know she has had... fantasies about The Boy Who Lived?" George asked, looking unusually serious. His mother nodded, so he continued "They haven't really stopped. I think she started to believe that Harry Potter would be found, and that they would live happily ever after" He glanced up the stairs towards Ginny's room, then back at his mother.

"Oh dear" Molly said, frowning slightly. She knew that Ginny had made up stories, but that was a while ago. The fact she was still doing it worried Molly a lot. She and Arthur knew they spoiled their little girl more than they should, and this had lead to Ginny thinking

she could have anything she wanted. Her brother's didn't help in that regard either. "Maybe I should have a little talk with her" She looked back at her sons "You can all go play for a little while" She couldn't help but smile as the kids ran from the room, whooping and jumping with happiness. But her smile faded, and she went upstairs to talk to her youngest child.

"Hermione?" It was playtime, and Harry had gone outside to the playground to see if he could find any of his friends. As he had walked out the door, he saw Hermione glancing nervously around.

"Yes"

"Are you alright"

"I am fine" She replied.

"My uncle always says that people only say I'm Fine when they are anything but" Harry said gently. He didn't add that the only reason his uncle said that was because Harry tended to respond to everything with "I'm Fine" whether he was or not.

"All the other kids are playing" She said, pointing towards the playground. Harry looked, and saw most of the friends he had made over the summer playing a game of tag.

"So go play too" He replied, looking at her curiously. She looked at him, then back at the group, then back at him with a mild expression of panic "Hermione"

"What if they don't like me"

"Why wouldn't they like you"

"People say I am too bossy. Too brainy. They call me names..." He could see the tears forming in her eyes, and remembered what Sirius had told him.

"So - you wanna play with me?" He asked. For a moment he really thought she was going to fall over in surprise, but she swallowed, then nodded. "Come on then" He took her hand and they started walking "When did you move here"

"A week ago" Hermione replied.

"And you didn't play out"

"I'm not supposed to leave home on my own, and mum and dad were working a lot" She gave a little sigh "Are your friends nice"

"Yeah" Harry said with a smile "Do you want me to call round tonight - I can bring Lucky and we can take him for a walk or something"

"I'll have to ask my parents"

"Okay" He looked around, and then pulled her towards a tree in the corner of the playing field "Lets sit down" She looked at him in surprise, but couldn't help smiling "What"

"You are fun" She said with another smile.

"My uncle tells me I am hyp... hyper..." He tried to remember the word Sirius had used to describe him, but all that was coming to mind was stuck on how pretty Hermione looked when she smiled.

"Hyperactive?" Hermione suggested.

"Hyperactive! That's what Uncle Rupert says" He threw his arms up and yelled "I AM HYPERACTIVE BOY", causing Hermione to burst in to giggles, and causing a lot of people to turn and stare at them. He looked back at his friend and smiled "Feeling better"

"You're kind of strange, but I like you"

"Thank you" He replied, but before he could say anything else the bell rang. They both stood up, and brushed the grass off their legs, then started walking back to the school.

"So - how was school dear"

"Not bad" Hermione replied, hanging her coat up and putting her bag down.

"What did you do today"

"I had to talk about myself, and then answer questions, then we drew our timetable and did some reading and sums"

"Anything else?" Claire Granger said, coming in from the kitchen.

"I made a friend" Hermione said with a smile "His name is Aaron James Brown and he comes from America"

"That's nice dear" Her mother said with a smile "Did you get any homework"

"No, but Aaron leant me a book. It's called The Hobbit" She rummaged through her bag, and brought it out "He says it is very good"

"It's a good story, but it might be a bit frightening" Claire looked down at her daughter "Would you like to read it with me"

"Mother! I'm not a baby any more"

"I know dear, but I don't want you to have nightmares and stay awake"

"I won't have nightmares and can I go out and play with Aaron and Lucky tonight"

"Who's Lucky"

"Aaron's dog"

"Oh. Well - go wash up for tea and I will think about it" Claire watched her daughter go upstairs, and couldn't help smiling. It was a bit disconcerting that a boy was going to call round for her daughter, but not because she was worried about the boy's intentions. She and her husband had decided to move house in part because they wanted to

set up their own dental practice, but also because of their daughter. Hermione hadn't been happy at her old school - she had had few friends and spent most of her time reading in her room, and from what they had been told about the junior school in their old town, she would have been even more unhappy. So, after a few discussions, they had sold up and moved for the start of the new school term. "And it seems it has helped" She said to herself as she went back in to the kitchen.

"Can Lucky come out to play later?" Harry asked as he was eating his tea. Sirius looked over at him questioningly "There's a new girl at school, and she seemed lonely, so I said I would call on her, and bring my dog with me"

"Why"

"Asking a girl to help you walk your dog is a good way to make friends" Harry said, then looked slightly worried as Sirius choked on his lemonade "Uncle"

"Sorry Aaron - just thinking about something" He put the glass down and wiped his mouth "Okay - Lucky can go out tonight. But we can't be out late - it's a school night you know"

The doorbell rang and Hermione charged down the stairs.

"Hermione Jane Granger - do not thunder down the stairs like a herd of rampaging elephants"

"Sorry mum" Hermione yelled, then slowed up and walked to the door. She opened it and smiled at Aaron, who was stood next to a huge black dog that was nearly as big as he was.

"Hello Hermione"

"Hello Aaron" She said, then realised her mother had come up behind her "Aaron, this is my mother. Mum - this is Aaron Brown and Lucky"

"Hello Mrs Granger" Harry replied, and Lucky gave a quick bark, causing Hermione and her mother to smile.

"Hello Aaron, it is very nice to meet you. Would you like to come in"

"Thank you" Aaron turned to Lucky "Wait out here, okay?" If Sirius thought there was a problem, Harry knew he would have no reluctance to drag Harry away, so when the dog simply laid down, Harry turned back, and followed Hermione in to her house.

Chapter 4

"So - do you want to explain why I am being called in to your school tomorrow?" Sirius asked Harry. They were eating tea, and looking forward to watching a film on video.

"No" Harry didn't look up and kept eating.

"Let me rephrase that" Sirius replied with a smile "Why am I being called in to your school tomorrow"

"Miss Saffron gave me that letter, and I gave it to you" Harry smirked slightly as Sirius pretended to glare at him.

"Aaron - you are going to tell me what I want to know, and now, or I will have to do something I don't want to do" He saw Harry smile broadly at this, and suddenly he began to wonder if he had overplayed his hand. Then Harry nodded.

"I got in to a fight" Harry looked up "Miss Saffron saw it and then gave me a letter to bring home to you"

"And why were you fighting"

"Do I have to tell you?" He asked mournfully.

"I am sure your teacher will tell me tomorrow, if you don't tell me now" Sirius said, then added "I might be able to help if you tell me now" Harry looked thoughtful for a moment, then smiled.

"Do you want to come and get it?" He asked, sounding confident.

"Are you sure?" Sirius could not help sounding surprised. It had only been six months since he had started teaching Harry occlumency, and up until recently his godson had not been able to keep him out. If Harry was challenging him then obviously he had managed to get past whatever problem he was having.

"Yes uncle, I am sure" He stared at Sirius, waiting for his godfather to attack him mentally.

Sirius thought for a moment, then closed his eyes. In his mind he pictured a wall of water, rushing towards a wall of stone. As he began his attack, he directed the water to speed up. As it got closer and closer, the water flowed faster and faster. He smirked in his mind when he saw the wall of stone suddenly thicken.

Just as the water was about to touch the wall, it came to a near halt, and then gently touched the wall of stone, felling gently for cracks.

For a few minutes Sirius was unable to find any gaps, and had almost decided to give up when suddenly the wall fractured slightly. His mind grinned in triumph, and he gently pushed in to the gap.

He almost fell out of his chair when he finally got through.

He was expecting to see Harry in a fight with another kid, or even Harry in front of his teacher.

What he saw was himself in a pink, frilly summer dress, standing in front of a giant monkey. And just as the image had time to register in his mind, he saw it fade, then go black. A moment later the wall re-appeared, twice as thick as before. And in the distance he could hear the sound of laughter.

He knew he was beaten, so he gently backed out of Harry's mind, and soon enough he was staring at his godson across the table.

"So - what do you think?" Harry asked.

"About what?" Sirius asked, still in shock at what had happened.

"Whether you want that dress for your birthday" Harry replied in a deadpan voice. Sirius just stared at him for a moment, then burst out laughing.

In his office at Hogwarts, Dumbledore looked at the calendar on his wall, and decided it was time. It was five months since The Ministry had declared Harry Potter to be dead, and in all that time there had been nothing to suggest otherwise. The Order had kept an eye open

for any signs that Harry, or Voldemort, might be alive and in hiding, but all their investigations had returned nothing. The last meeting had been a month ago, and he had more or less put The Order on standby until further notice.

So now he could do something he had felt he should do for six years.

When Godric's Hollow had fallen, and James and Lily had been killed, Dumbledore thought about the Potter fortune almost at once. Only a few of the old families were extremely wealthy any more - the Malfoys, the Longbottoms, the Blacks, the Dumbledores and the McGonagalls were the most notable. But even in that list only the Malfoys and the Blacks could rival the Potters in financial terms. He didn't know the exact figures, but he guessed it was in the tens of millions of galleons, if not more.

And now that the last Potter was dead, and the money would no longer be needed for the future of the family, Albus knew he could put it to good use. The War against Voldemort had left a lot families in dire straits and setting up a war victims fund could ease their burden, and his, a great deal. And other families had problems affording the fees for Hogwarts. If he could persuade The Ministry to give scholarships - funded by the Potter fortune - then a lot more children could get a proper education.

He knew that while setting up the James and Lily Potter memorial fund, and the Harry Potter scholarship fund, would memorialise the family for a long time, it would also ensure that he - Albus Dumbledore - would be remembered as a mentor and - to some degree - saviour of the wizarding world.

He already held that position - the defeat of Grindewald had ensured that he would be revered for the rest of his life - but it never hurt to remind people of what they owed him. And, of course, the more they worshipped him as a hero, the less they would ask questions about the rise of Lord Voldemort, and any part that Dumbledore might have played in that little debacle.

Dumbledore shook his head to clear his thoughts, then stood up and walked over to the fireplace. As he picked up a handful of floo powder, he thought about the best way to approach The Ministry.

The next day Sirius walked Harry to school for the first time in two months. Although Harry knew why his godfather was being so careful, he had eventually asked Sirius to let him walk to and from school on his own. This was partly because he felt a bit stupid being the only person in his class who was walked to school, but also so he could walk with Hermione, at least part of the way.

It turned out that he and Hermione had a lot in common, and had now become best friends. In the back of his mind he knew this was not a good idea. When he left for Hogwarts, he would have to abandon her, instead of going to senior school with her, but that was ages away and for now he wanted to be her friend.

"Aaron!" He heard her call out his name, and the two of them stopped and turned. Hermione was running up the street towards them, but she slowed down when she saw Sirius.

"Hermione, this is my Uncle Rupert"

"Hello" Sirius said "You must be the friend Harry is always talking about" Sirius held out his hand, and Hermione took it.

"It's nice to meet you Mr Brown"

"It's Goldman" Harry replied.

"Sorry, Mr Goldman. Aaron has told me a lot about you as well" She said, then turned to Harry "Is this because of"

"Yes" Harry said, cutting Hermione off before she could say anything more. She looked at him questioningly, but he shook his head. Sirius watched the by-play between them with a fond look, then he turned to his godson.

"Nephew, is there something you want to tell me"

"No Uncle" Harry replied "Shouldn't we be getting to school?" Sirius looked at him, then turned to the girl walking beside them.

"Miss Granger - perhaps you could tell me why my nephew refuses to talk to me about the fight he got in to, and why he won't tell me about it" Sirius watched as a series of non-verbal exchanges flew between the two children, and he couldn't help smiling in surprise. He thought the system The Marauders had developed was good, but this had it beat hands down. He had a fair idea of what they were arguing about, but the exact details were a mystery. He continued to watch for a few moments, then he gave a fake cough to attract their attention. They both turned and looked at him.

"Are either of you going to tell me"

"No" Harry replied, and Hermione nodded in agreement. Sirius glared at them both for a moment, then gave a quick laugh "Is there no respect for your elders any more"

"Apparently not" Hermione replied with a smile.

When they reached the gates to the school, Hermione gave Harry a brief smile, then walked in. Sirius watched her go, then turned back to his godson.

"So - where would I find your Headmistress?"

Albus Dumbledore walked in to Gringotts with a signed letter from The Minister herself. She had been easy enough to convince - she saw the political upside in setting up the trusts, and from all he had heard in recent months, Minister Bagnold could use all the political capital she could muster. If she couldn't have a major success soon, it was likely she would be replaced in short order.

He approached one of the tellers and asked to speak to the manager. The teller looked at him in surprise, then turned and walked towards the offices at the back. Dumbledore glanced around, then looked back when he saw the teller returning.

"Ragnok will see you now, Professor Dumbledore" The goblin said, and escorted him to the office at the end of the hall. He knocked once,

then pushed the door open and said "You may enter" Dumbledore thanked him, then walked in to the office.

"Professor Dumbledore" Ragnok said "It is not very often we see you here"

"Hogwarts keeps me busy, of course"

"And The Order Of The Phoenix?" Ragnok asked with a sly smile.

"It is stood down for the moment - with Lord Voldemort gone, their work is not as time consuming as it was" He wasn't surprised that the goblins knew about the supposedly secret Order - there wasn't much that they didn't know about. But they were fanatical about keeping secrets, so he wasn't that worried that they knew.

"So - with what can I help you today"

"A sad matter, but hopefully one that can be used to make our world a much better place" He pulled out the letter from The Minister "As you are no doubt aware, The Ministry has declared Harry Potter officially dead"

"We are aware of this development" Ragnok replied in a neutral voice.

"James and Lily had no other children, and there are no other people who could inherit it"

"I believe Mrs Potter had a sister"

"Petunia Dursley, nee Evans, is a muggle and therefore not eligible to inherit one of the Older Fortunes" He handed over the letter "Minister Bagnold thought that the money could be put to good use"

Ragnok stared at him for a moment, then he read the letter. The Minister wanted him to turn over the control of the Potter vaults to Professor Dumbledore, so that the money could be used to set up scholarships and help victims of the war against Voldemort. He looked back at Dumbledore and smiled, not believing it for a moment. The letter was genuine, but this wasn't Milicent Bagnold's idea - the current Minister - just didn't have the imagination nor the political will

to think it up. Ragnok was certain it was Dumbledore's idea, but since the letter was signed and stamped, there wasn't a lot he could do without causing an incident.

"Very well. If you give me a few moments, I will be able to transfer the vaults to your control. In normal circumstances we would simply transfer the money to your vault, however the contents of the Potter vaults would not fit in your current vault, and if the intention is to set up a number of trusts, then it would be wise to keep your money and the trust money separate, so there would be no question of impropriety" Dumbledore smiled and nodded, so Ragnok stood up and walked to his private office. He called for the Head of Vault Management, then he pulled out the ledger for the Potter vaults.

Two minutes later he walked back in to his office, and sat down behind his desk. He looked at the letter again, then up at Dumbledore.

"I am very sorry, but we can not complete your request" He felt the urge to smile as Dumbledore sat bolt upright in surprise.

"May I ask why not?" Dumbledore asked calmly.

"It would appear that The Minister is a bit premature in declaring the Potter line at an end"

"Pardon me"

"The records of the Potter vaults show that Harry Potter has control over the vault, and as the current Head of the Potter house, the contents of said vaults can not be transferred without his permission" The urge to smile grew even stronger as the colour drained out of Dumbledore's face.

"But The Minister has"

"...No authorisation over our laws, as you well know. Whether The Ministry believes Mr Potter is dead or not, our records show that he has control of the vaults and we are not permitted to interfere"

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, thinking about what he had been told. Suddenly a thought occurred to him.

"What about the vault belonging to Sirius Black? Is that still under his control"

"May I ask the nature of your interest in that vault?" Ragnok asked politely.

"Harry Potter was kidnapped by Black when his parents were killed. If Harry is still alive, then it would be helpful to know whether Black is alive or not"

"I understand, but I am afraid the news will be of no help"

"Because"

"Mr Black emptied his vault two nights after the end of the war, and he released it back to us"

"Two nights AFTER?" Dumbledore nearly yelled in surprise "You must have known what he had done by then? Or is this another example of your laws"

"We do not take sides, Professor" Ragnok said in a stern voice "Is there anything else we can do for you today"

"No. Thank you" Dumbledore said, standing up "I must go and inform The Minister" He left the office, then walked out of the bank.

He decided to put off informing The Ministry, heading instead towards The Leaky Cauldon so he could return to his office. If Harry was alive, he had things to do.

"Mum"

"Yes dear"

"If someone was in trouble, and I could help them, but it would get another person in to trouble instead, as well as getting me in to trouble, should I help?" Claire Granger looked down at her daughter,

trying to work out exactly what Hermione had just said, as well as how she had said it in one breath.

"How about you tell me what the matter is, and I will tell you what I think"

"You know Aaron?" Her mother nodded "He has been suspended for a week, because he got in to a fight"

"Okay"

"He beat up Tristin Smith a few days ago, and he got caught"

"Why did he beat up this other boy"

"Because..." Hermione dropped her eyes to the floor "Tristin was making fun of me, and of you and Dad" She looked up again "Aaron overheard him, and told him to stop. Tristin didn't listen, so Aaron said he was going to tell" Hermione gulped, then continued "Tristin hit him... and Aaron hit back" She stopped talking and looked up at her mother "When Miss Saffron came over, Tristin was on the ground, and Aaron wasn't"

"So why does... so why"

"Tristin said Aaron started it, and I didn't say anything" Hermione felt tears well up in her eyes "I was scared mum, so Aaron took the blame"

"But now you think you should tell the truth"

"Yes - Aaron shouldn't be in trouble - and it's my fault he is" Her mother looked at her thoughtfully, then leaned over and hugged her.

"I am very proud of you love - you are doing a very good thing. Do you want me to come with you"

"Yes" Hermione said, smiling for the first time in the conversation.

"Okay - I will go with you tomorrow"

"Thanks mum"

Ginny ran back to her room, and threw herself on her bed with a big smile and a giggle. Moments before she had been listening to her parents talking to Professor Dumbledore - talking about Harry Potter.

He was ALIVE! Her handsome prince was alive, and one day he would come and rescue her!

When Molly looked in on her daughter, she was surprised, but happy, to see Ginny sleeping with a smile on her face.

Chapter 5

"Hermione" Her mother called from downstairs. Hermione was reading in her room, and jumped slightly at the level of her mother's yell. Something had obviously annoyed her, and Hermione started to list everything she had done in the past few days that could fit that criteria. She knew she should be ashamed of herself, but in the three and a half years since she had met Aaron Brown, and become his friend, she had discovered a mischievous side she never knew she had. And it was fair to say that between them they had playfully terrorized most of their classmates, and most of the other years in their school as well.

It had landed them both in trouble, and more than once her mother had been in to school to hear a lecture about how her daughter was a bad influence, which had led Hermione to being grounded, sent to bed, and forbidden from seeing Aaron outside school.

As if that was going to stop them.

But she had been on her best behavior for the past few weeks - her parents were talking about going to Florida for a holiday, and she didn't want to do anything to make them think twice about it. So even as she got up and went downstairs, she couldn't think of anything she could have done to deserve one her mother's yells.

Harry came down from his room to see Sirius pacing back and forth in the living room.

"Uncle?" Harry watched him pace back and forth, but when Sirius didn't respond Harry stood up and walked in to his godfather's path. Sirius turned and suddenly looked up at the object in his path.

"Aaron"

"What's wrong"

"What makes you think anything is wrong"

"The pacing. And you didn't hear me when I came in"

"Lucky guess" Sirius smiled, then he said "You should sit down. I have some bad news"

"Bad news?" Harry said, sitting down suddenly "It's not... him is it"

"Him?" Sirius asked, confused. Then his eyes lit up with understanding "Voldemort?" Harry nodded "No - he is still missing and hopefully dead" Harry nodded his agreement "No - the problem is the letter hasn't come"

"The letter?" Now Harry's face was a mask of confusion.

"Your Hogwarts letter" Sirius said, and Harry suddenly understood why Sirius was so concerned, because he was feeling the same.

"So... what does it mean?" Harry asked after a moment.

"It could mean a lot of things" Sirius sighed, sitting down "But generally it means you are not magical, or at least not magical enough to attend the school, or that the staff and governors have decided you are not to be invited, or that they know you have been invited elsewhere"

"You know that I haven't been invited elsewhere" Harry replied "So I guess that means I am not magical, or they don't want me"

"Lift up the sofa over there, using nothing but this" Sirius passed his wand to Harry, and watched as his godson levitated the sofa up two feet, then let it fall gently back down to the floor "I think that the question of you not being powerful is not of issue"

"So they don't want me?" Harry said softly "Why wouldn't they want me?" Sirius stood up and walked over to Harry, then sat down next to him and hugged him.

"It will be a misunderstanding" Sirius said "They will..." Suddenly his face lit up and he smiled "They think you are dead" Harry looked at him in surprise.

"Why do you sound so happy about that"

"Ah... it's a long story"

"Mum" Ginny asked.

"Yes dear"

"Did Ron get his letter this morning"

"Yes dear"

"Do you think you could talk to Headmaster Dumbledore for me"

"Why dear"

"So I can go with Ron" Molly, who had only been half listening to her daughter, suddenly span round, nearly dropping the dishes she was doing.

"Pardon"

"Can I go with Ron to Hogwarts"

"You aren't old enough"

"But if Professor Dumbledore let me"

"He would say you aren't ready dear. You aren't magically prepared yet - you need another year"

"I am ready"

"That's what everyone thinks Ginny, but you can't go to school until you are eleven - it might be dangerous" Molly sighed as her daughter left the kitchen, thinking that she and Arthur really needed to talk to their youngest in the near future.

"So what do we do about it?" Harry asked "Do we send them an owl"

"We can't" Sirius replied "We live in an unplottable house, so no owl would be able to find us"

"Even if we altered the charm to let a specific owl find us?" Harry laughed at the surprised look on Sirius' face "I did read the book you gave me for Christmas, Uncle Rupert"

"So it would appear" Sirius smiled in return "But if..." He glanced at the clock on the wall "... do you want the long answer or the short answer"

"Do we have time for the long one"

"No"

"Then the short one will do"

"Someone could follow the owl back and find us"

"Oh" Harry paused "How does that differ from the long one"

"Less politics and snarkyness about interfering Mugwumps" Sirius said in a deadpan voice, then smiled "We should be going - Hermione will be waiting"

"Okay" Harry smiled, then walked over to the fireplace and pulled a leash down. He turned back to Sirius and with an evil smile said "Walkies!"

Hermione was sat on a bench in the park, waiting for Aaron to appear. She had been waiting for ten minutes, but had barely noticed. All she could think about was the letter she had received that morning, and the visit she had received that afternoon.

(flashback)

"Hermione Jane Granger - what is the meaning of this?" Her mother asked. Hermione looked at her, not understanding what her mother

was talking about, until her mother handed her a letter. She looked at it - it was definitely addressed to her, but it was handwritten in a very cultured hand. She turned it over and saw a wax seal with a coat of arms above it. Even as she turned it over her mind translated the text under the coat of arms, and she thought "What kind of motto is 'Don't tickle a sleeping dragon'?" She looked at it again, then looked back at her mother "I have no idea"

"It's not from Aaron? A joke to celebrate the last month of term"

"He writes like a two year old on a roller coaster - he could never write this well" She looked back at the envelope "Should I open it"

"Yes" Her mother replied, looking interested. She watched as her daughter opened the envelope carefully, and pulled out the paper inside. There was silence for a few moments as she read it, then she looked up.

"It says I am a witch"

(end flashback)

Her mother had been, unsurprisingly, skeptical. She had thought that Hermione and Aaron had set this up together, possibly with the help of Aaron's Uncle Rupert. Hermione had tried to convince her, but hadn't succeeded.

At least until the afternoon when they had had a visitor.

(flashback)

"Mrs Granger?" The woman at the front door had a broad Scottish accent and a very odd taste in clothing, but Claire Granger nodded "May I come in? We have to discuss your daughter"

"What about my daughter?" Claire asked "And who are you"

"I believe you received a letter this morning, from the Headmaster of Hogwarts"

"Yes" Claire said, warily.

"I have come to talk to you about your daughter's future"

"That letter was REAL?" Hermione said, coming to the door.

"Yes Miss Granger, it was real"

"Magic is real?" Hermione asked.

"Perhaps I should come in now?" The woman looked around "We really shouldn't discuss this in public" Hermione looked at her mother hopefully, and Claire nodded, then stood aside.

(end flashback)

She had planned to go to the local secondary school, along with Aaron, but now - now she would be going to a magical school, and she couldn't tell him.

She had never lied to him, but now, if she wanted to stay friends she would never be able to tell him the truth.

She looked up as she saw Lucky bounding towards her, followed by Aaron. The pair of them ran towards her, then skidded to a halt.

"Minnie!!" Aaron yelled in an exuberant voice.

"Didn't I say I would hurt you if you called me that again"

"Yes"

"You are obviously in a good mood today" She said with a smile

"What's up"

"Oh - nothing. Just happy I guess" He sat down next to her while Lucky bounded around them "So - what's wrong"

"What makes you think something is wrong"

"Just a feeling" He reached up and wiped a tear that had just started to trickle down her cheek.

"Sorry" She wiped her eyes "You weren't supposed to see that" She looked at her fingers, then back up at him "I have something to tell you"

"Is it possible"

"Probably"

"Will this change our plan"

"Probably"

"Are you trying to annoy me on purpose"

"Probably"

"Hermione Granger at Hogwarts" He smiled at the thought "This could be fun"

Chapter 6

Harry Potter woke up on the morning of his eleventh birthday with a smile. This was not unusual - Sirius always made his birthday special - but today was extra special for a whole other reason. Today would be the last day he would have to hide who he was. Today, Aaron Brown would be seen for the last time, and Harry Potter would return to the wizarding world.

Sirius was taking him to the Ministry For Magic, partly to register him as being alive, but also to pick up his letter from Hogwarts, and all of the things he would need for school. Harry would have preferred his godfather to go as himself, but - to the world at large - Sirius Black was still a wanted Death Eater, and for accessory to murdering Lily and James Potter. And without proof, he could not take the risk that he would be arrested, or kissed, on sight.

"You ready to go?" Sirius asked from behind him, and as he turned, he could not help gasping in surprise "So - you like my new look then"

"It's amazing" Harry said - and he really meant it. His godfather now looked like neither Sirius Black nor Rupert Goldman. And if Harry had grown up somewhere else, he would not have been able to recognise him at all.

"You remember the book you bought me for my birthday?" Sirius asked, and when Harry nodded, he continued "Well there was a masking spell in there that was very useful" He handed his wand to Harry "Try negating it"

"Finite Incantatum!" Harry said, but nothing happened. He knew the spell had worked, but it hadn't affected his godfather's disguise at all.

"The masking spell basically binds the magic of another spell to more than one source" Sirius said, taking his wand back "So the glamour spell is bound to my core, your core and the clock on the mantelpiece"

"So negating the spell would have to be cast on all three?" Harry asked, sounding surprised.

"All three at once" Sirius replied smugly "So it makes it almost impossible to negate. And because the spell is tied to three sources, the magical signature is reduced to a third, making it almost impossible to detect"

"Can this work for bigger spells"

"Like"

"Shields? Wards? Transfiguration"

"Maybe" Sirius said thoughtfully "But the more power a spell requires, the less effective the masking spell will become. And any non-magical item will burn out in a short while"

"Oh"

"But maybe we could try it over the holidays" Sirius said, sounding excited at the thought. But then he glanced at his watch "We should be going"

"Okay" Harry picked up his jacket, and followed Sirius downstairs "So - how are we getting there?"

"According to Professor McGonagall, there is a... a floo point somewhere near here" Hermione said as she and her parents walked down the street "If we go there and present this letter, they will show us how to get to London via the fireplace" She looked up at her parents, who were staring at her as if she was crazy "I know - it sounded stupid to me as well, but a month ago we would have said that about magic, so what do we have to lose"

"Okay dear, we will follow you, but don't go too far ahead"

"Yes dad" She replied, smiling slightly. Even though she was now setting off on a whole new adventure in a whole new world, she was still glad to know her parents would worry about her.

Five minutes later they arrived at the address Professor McGonagall had given her, and they went inside.

Harry and Sirius apparated in to the receiving room at The Ministry and looked around. It was empty except for two guards stationed at the only exit in the room. They walked over to the door, nodded at the guards as they passed, then they found themselves in the Atrium, opposite the Fountain of Magical Brethren, depicting the most unlikely scene Harry could imagine. He stared at it for a moment, then burst in to laughter.

"I know" Sirius said "I can't believe it either. Personally I think that whoever designed it was deluding them self" He stared at the statue that showed a wizard, an elf, a centaur and a stag standing in perfect harmony, as equals. Ever since Sirius had first seen it as a child, he had wanted to blow it up, or at least make it more realistic.

But today wasn't the day for bold political statements that would turn the wizarding world on its head.

Today was a day to turn the wizarding world on its head for a whole different reason. He smiled again at the thought of what they were about to do. He turned to Harry.

"You ready"

"Yes"

"Then lets go"

"Minister, there is a Michael Whiteheart to see you without an appointment"

"Tell him to make an appointment"

"He says it is rather important, and that you will want to see him"

"Did he say what it was about"

"He wants to introduce you to his ward"

"And who is his ward"

"Harry Potter, Minister"

Cornelius Fudge stared at the intercom for a moment, his mouth open in shock. Then he gathered his wits and said in a calm, almost uninterested voice "Very well. Show him in"

A moment later two people were ushered in to his office. He didn't recognise either of them, but as they came towards his desk, he realised he could make out a scar on the boy's forehead. He knew the story - there wasn't a wizard alive who didn't - but he never believed he would see it in person.

"Good morning Minister" Sirius said calmly "My name is Michael Janus Whiteheart, and this is my ward, and honorary nephew, Master Harry James Potter" He noticed the look on the Minister's face "Who I assume you have heard of"

"Mr Potter, it is truly an honour to meet you" He paused, then smiled sheepishly "Especially since we have you down as dead"

"That is one of the reasons we are here" Sirius said "Obviously Harry isn't dead, and - assuming he wants to live in the magical world, it will be necessary to correct that misunderstanding" Sirius looked down at Harry "Also, if it is possible, we would like to find out how Harry came to be declared dead, as neither he nor I would have done that"

"I will look in to it" Minister Fudge said "It was before my time, of course"

"Of course" Sirius replied "And we are not blaming you for the mistake - we simply want it cleared up" He looked down at Harry, how mouthed "Hogwarts" to his godfather "Oh yes - would it also be possible for you to contact Hogwarts? Harry didn't receive his letter, and there is now only a month before school starts"

"Of course, but... if I may, I have some questions, and I am sure some of my colleagues will have questions as well" Sirius glanced at Harry, who shrugged.

"Okay. We have some shopping to do, so how about we come back in one hour. We will be happy to answer most of your questions then"

"Most"

"As you can imagine, Harry's safety and security is my priority, so I won't answer any questions that might compromise that" He looked at the Minister "It is not that I distrust the Ministry, or you personally Mr Fudge, but there are somethings I am not willing to tell anyone"

"I understand" Fudge replied "And I will try to avoid invading your privacy where possible" He looked down at Harry "But you must understand that there are some things we will need to know" Sirius stared back at him, then nodded.

"We will be back in an hour, Minister" Sirius said, then he and Harry turned and left. Minister Fudge watched them go, then turned back to his desk. He had things to do.

Minerva McGonagall didn't run. It wasn't that she didn't know how to, or that she was too old or weak to do so, it was just that she felt it was undignified and not becoming of a Hogwarts Professor.

But now she found herself running to the Headmasters office, only half caring that there were no students to see her.

She ran up to the gargoyle and cast the bypass spell, not having the breath to call out the password. Once it had moved, she bolted up the stairs and rushed in to the office.

"Albus" She was panting and out of breath "The Ministry contacted me"

"About what?" Dumbledore asked, wondering what had caused his deputy's odd behavior.

"The Minister asked for a Hogwarts letter to be sent to his office" Minerva said. She knew she was teasing him a little, but with the news she was about to deliver, she felt she had the upper hand.

"Why does he want that?" Dumbledore asked, looking up "The Ministry doesn't usually concern itself with the running of the school" 'And a good thing too' He thought 'If Ministers Bagnold and Fudge are anything to go by'

"The letter was sent out, but it came back" She paused, and - making sure she was watching his reaction - she added "The letter was to Harry Potter" She was not disappointed as Dumbledore leapt to his feet, nearly knocking his desk over.

"Harry is at The Ministry? Now"

"The Minister didn't say. He simply requested that we send Mr Potter's letter with all due haste"

"Then deliver it, we shall" Dumbledore said, coming round from behind his desk "Would you like to come with me?"

"So - what do you think?" Sirius asked. He and Harry had been exploring Diagon Alley for half an hour, and Sirius could honestly say he had never seen his godson so enthralled.

"It's amazing" Harry said "I have never seen so much..." He trailed off as something caught his attention.

Hermione Granger had just walked out of one of the shops, and was heading towards them.

Hermione and her parents had been looking round the Alley for ten minutes when Hermione had spotted a bookshop. Claire could not help putting her head in her hands as both Hermione and her father's eyes lit up.

Ten minutes later she was forced to drag both of them out of the shop - both carrying bags full of books of various types. Hermione had bought a lot of books on magical theory and practice, while her father had bought books about the magical world itself.

They had decided to get some lunch, and were walking back down the street, when Hermione stopped and stared at two people coming towards them.

"Hermione?" Her father had turned back to see why she had stopped.

"Yes dad"

"Are you alright"

"I think so..." He watched as his daughter's eyes follow a young boy - he would guess he was about her age - then glanced back at his daughter.

"You do know you are staring, don't you"

"Daddy!" She tore her gaze away from the boy, still not quite knowing why he had caught her eye "I am sure I know him from somewhere"

"Do you want to go over and say hello?" Hermione glanced back at the boy and saw him and the man he was with staring in to the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies.

"I don't know..."

"Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall" Amelia Bones, head of the DMLE, was walking towards the main conference room in The Ministry when she ran in to two of her old professors "This is a pleasant surprise. What brings you to these hallowed halls"

"The Minister asked us to come" Dumbledore said with a smile "He indicated it was important"

"He called a meeting of all the department heads, but he hasn't told us what it is about" Dumbledore looked across at his deputy, but she looked as confused as he was.

"Well - we should be getting along" McGonagall said "I don't think we want to keep The Minister waiting"

"So - are you going to talk to her?" Sirius asked. They had been staring in the shop window for five minutes, and he was running out of things to look at.

"Do you think she knows who I am?" He looked up at Sirius, who looked down at him questioningly "I mean - Harry Potter is a famous name in the magical world, so"

"I don't think she will have had time to find out about you. Her letter would only have come about a month ago"

"Okay" He turned to see Hermione, and her parents, coming towards him, but the look on Hermione's face made him glance up at Sirius to confirm his previous comment. Sirius nodded, then nudged Harry to take a step forward.

"Hello" Hermione said "Are you going to Hogwarts too"

"Yes" He took a deep breath "My name is Harry Potter, and this is my Uncle Michael"

"Hi. I'm Hermione Granger, and these are my parents Claire and Arnold Granger" She smiled "This will seem like an odd question, but have we met before"

"I don't think so - I am sure I would have remembered it" He looked up at Sirius, who smiled back at him. Then his uncle tapped his watch. Harry nodded then turned back to Hermione "I'm sorry, but we have to go. But no doubt I will see you again soon, Miss Granger"

"Hermione"

"No - Harry" He saw his friend smile.

"Very funny" She smiled again, then, impulsively, she leaned over and hugged him. She missed it, but her parents saw his eyebrows go up in surprise, and a small grin spread across his face. Claire and Arnold glanced at each other, and smiled. Hermione stepped back, and the three of them watched Harry and Sirius depart.

"Seems nice" Arnold said, causing his daughter to blush.

Chapter 7

Sirius and Harry walked in to The Ministry, and headed towards the reception point.

"We have an appointment with The Minister" Sirius said.

"Yes Mr Whiteheart. You are expected" The witch on duty said
"Please may I see your wands"

"This is mine" Sirius said, handing it over. He waited until she picked it up to add "But Mr Potter hasn't purchased his yet" The witch's head shot up, and she looked over at Harry, dropped Sirius' wand in surprise, then - after bending over to pick it up, she banged her head on the underside of the desk. Sirius couldn't help smirking, while Harry blushed and stared at his feet.

When the witch had sorted herself out, she handed back Sirius' wand and told them to go to the conference room on the fourth floor, where they would be met.

"No escort?" Sirius asked as they walked down a corridor.

"Can I expect the same reaction from everyone else?" Harry asked, noticing that everyone was staring at him as he walked passed.

"Probably, yes" Sirius said, resting his hand on Harry's shoulder "You are pretty famous Harry, and even more than you is the fact that you are the boy who lived, then vanished, then died, then came back to life and came back"

"Please tell me that is not what people are going to call me?" The pained look on Harry's face made Sirius smile.

"It'll get better - it has only been an hour since you came back. Give them time to adjust"

They walked along in silence until they reached the door to the conference room. Two Aurors were stationed outside the doors. Sirius couldn't help smiling as they walked up to them - the two Aurors who were about to let him in to a room with Minister Fudge

were two of the ones that Minister Bagnold has assigned to "hunt him down like a dog"

"We are here to speak with Minister Fudge, and I assume some other people as well"

"Yes, Mr Whiteheart" The first Auror - Bradley her name was - said, then added "I am going to have to ask you for your wand"

"My wand"

"You are about to walk in to a room with the vast majority of the government, and with all due respect, Mr Whiteheart, we know nothing about you"

"And I know nothing about anyone in that room. I am aware of Mr Potter's unique position in this world. And I also know that some members of the previous government were arrested after the fall of Lord Voldemort for supporting him" He saw the outraged look on the Aurors' faces, and kept his face straight even though he was laughing on the inside "I will make you a deal - I keep my wand, and you can bring an army of Aurors with you to protect the Minister and anyone else you want to" The two Aurors looked at each other, then Bradley turned and went in to the conference room.

Five minutes later, she came out and then walked down the corridor. Harry watched her walk away, then turned to Sirius and looked at him questioningly. Sirius leaned over and whispered "Back when you first went missing, these two were ready to lynch me, then re-animate me and lynch me again" He smirked "If I can mess with them a little, it brings a smile to my face" He saw Harry smile as well "Fun, isn't it"

Harry was about to answer when he saw something that made his mouth fall open in surprise. He looked over at Sirius, who had an equally surprised look on his face. A group of thirty Aurors was coming down the hall towards them.

"Mr Whiteheart? This is your escort. Does it meet with your approval"

"Thank you, yes" He smiled "Shall we go?"

Minister Fudge looked up as the doors opened, and watched as thirty Aurors came in and took up positions around the room. Then the doors opened again and the whole room fell silent as two people - a man and a boy - walked in.

"Gentlemen, please have a seat" Fudge said. He watched the reaction of everyone in the room. All but one of the assembled people was watching Harry as he walked across and took his seat. Albus Dumbledore, however, was watching Michale Whiteheart, and staring at him as if he were trying to read the man's mind.

"Mr Whiteheart - can you tell us why you have come here with Mr Potter today?" Fudge asked.

"I would be happy to Sirius" replied "Sixteen years ago, I started exchanging letters with a Hogwarts student named James Potter. And we became good friends, even though we had never met. We continued writing to each other, even after we both left school. And after he married Lily Evans, and had Harry here" He turned and smiled at his godson "Then in late 1981 he wrote to say that he was going in to hiding, as his family was under threat from Voldemort" He could not help frowning when almost everyone in the room shuddered "Oh for the love of Arkon - he has been dead and gone for ten years. Stop being afraid of his name already"

"You were saying that Mr Potter - Mr James Potter that is - had gone in to hiding?" Amelia Bones asked.

"Yes. And then about two weeks later I received news that he had been killed, along with his dear wife. And then I was told that his son was missing"

He pulled a letter out of his robes, noticing that - as he did so - a few of the Aurors raised their wands in his direction.

"James gave me guardianship of Harry if anything should happen to him and Lily, and if his friend Sirius was not in a position to keep his promise to take Harry himself" He didn't dare look at Harry when he said this "So I came over, and began to look for Harry. From James'

letters I knew of a few places to start, and I got lucky - about two weeks after the fall of Voldemort I found Black hiding out in an abandoned house. He had Harry tied up, and appeared to be trying to use Harry to bring back his Dark Master" He knew for certain that he should not look at Harry now - he could feel the boy's laughter in the back of his mind "I waited until he was gone, then I took Harry and vanished. Since then have been living in hiding, trying to keep Harry safe, to allow him to grow up and have a relatively normal life in the process" He looked around at the assembled group "The only reason we have come forward today is because Harry should be starting Hogwarts in a month's time, and when we didn't receive the letter we thought we should find out why"

"Mr Whiteheart. My name is Amelia Bones, and I run the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. May I ask you a few questions?" Sirius nodded "Why didn't you turn Harry over to The Ministry when you rescued him"

"With all due respect to Minister Fudge, and everyone else in this room and indeed in this government, there were a number of known Voldemort supporters in Minister Bagnold's administration. I could not take the risk of rescuing Harry from Black, only to have him killed by someone in The Ministry. Besides - James' letter gave me the power to make decisions about Harry's future, so I did nothing wrong"

"Where are you living now?" Bones asked.

"At my house"

"Which is where"

"I can't say" He held up his hand as a number of people started talking at once "I have kept Harry safe for ten years by keeping my secrets. I am not going to change that now"

"You distrust us?" Fudge asked.

"I don't know any of you well enough to trust you, so I will continue to keep him safe as I have done for the past ten years"

"Minister, if I may?" Dumbledore spoke up. Fudge nodded "If Harry is to attend Hogwarts, Mr Whiteheart, how do you intend to keep him safe"

"And you are..." Sirius asked, knowing how much it would annoy him.

"My name is Albus Dumbledore, and I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts"

"Of course. James had a lot to say about you in his letters"

"I would imagine he did" Dumbledore said "But how do you intend to keep Harry safe at Hogwarts"

"I would imagine that would be your responsibility, Headmaster" Sirius replied "While he is at your school, he will be under your protection. But when he isn't, I will keep him safe"

"And if we need to contact you, or get hold of you"

"I will ensure it is possible" Sirius replied "But I am not going to tell you the location of my property, so please stop asking, or I might get annoyed"

"Harry" McGonagall turned to Harry "My name is Professor McGonagall. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions"

"No m'am" Harry replied, checking his shields were in place.

"How have you been"

"I am fine, thank you"

"What sort of education have you had"

"My Uncle has"

"Your uncle?" Fudge asked.

"Uncle Michael"

"I thought"

"Oh - sorry" Sirius said "I am his guardian, but when he was younger he started calling me Uncle Michael, and I didn't see any reason to stop him"

"Very well - you were saying Mr Potter"

"Uncle Michael has been teaching me basic magical theory, and a number of basic charms. He also let me attend a muggle school for the past four years to let me learn all about the muggle world, and to make friends, and - as he put it - to learn to play nice with others"

"You went to a muggle school?" Fudge asked in surprise.

"Yes - and I made a number of good friends, and learned about the muggle world"

"Do you think it would have been better for him to grow up all alone? No friends? No one except me for company?" Sirius yelled "And then be thrust in to Hogwarts, with hundreds of other students and no idea how to act in a group?" He glanced at Harry, then spoke calmly "We were perfectly safe, and since you - a relatively liberal wizard - could not conceive of Harry living in the muggle world, do you think any of the death eaters would even consider it?" He looked around, and realised everyone understood him.

"Very well Mr Whiteheart. We will correct our records to show Mr Potter as being alive, and that you are his guardian" Fudge said "Albus - if you could provide Mr Potter with his letter and... Mr Whiteheart?" The Minister noticed that Sirius was sat with his hand in the air.

"I just wanted to ask a couple of things"

"Go ahead"

"How did Harry end up being declared dead"

"It is normal practice after a period of time"

"I thought it was ten years, not five or six?" Sirius looked around the room, and saw a few people looking uncomfortable.

"For adults, it is" Amelia replied "But since Harry was taken by Black, and no one had seen him, it was decided six years was enough"

"This wouldn't have anything to do with the Potter fortune? The thought of waiting ten years to get your hands on it must have killed you"

"The Potter vaults have not been touched" Fudge said, though Sirius noted Dumbledore was not looking him in the eye.

"Glad to hear it" And secondly - I would like to ask a favour"

"Of course"

"When you remove Harry's name from the wall, can you add the names of James and Lily Potter in his place"

"Mr Whiteheart, I realise you are from another country, and so may not understand, but the Wall is used to remember those who have done a great service to this world"

"Such as Harry did when he brought about Voldemort's fall"

"Indeed"

"Do you know how he did it?" Sirius asked. When no one replied, he looked at Harry, who gulped, then nodded. He knew what he was about to hear - he and Sirius had discussed it the night before - but that didn't make any easier to listen to it.

"James and Lily put their family under a Fidelius Charm, and made one of their friends the secret keeper. Sadly he betrayed them, and gave the secret to Voldemort"

"Voldemort came to my house" Harry said softly "He came up the path, which is when my father saw him" He paused, then looked directly at Minister Fudge "My father ran downstairs to confront Voldemort so that my mother could escape with me. My father was one of the best wizards of his generation, but he knew he couldn't win, and that he would most likely be tortured and then killed, but he went anyway" He stopped, and turned back to Sirius.

"Voldemort killed James without a second thought, then he entered the house and set about destroying it. After he had started a few fires, he went up to Harry's nursery and confronted Lily" He paused and looked around the room - all of them were hanging on his every word, except Harry, who was staring at the table, eyes shining with unshed tears "She gave her life to protect your hero, and it was that act of sacrifice that protected my nephew, and caused the killing curse to rebound on to Voldemort and... take care of him" He put his arms around his godson "The two people you are so quick to dismiss gave their lives to protect their son, even though they knew they had no chance of surviving it" He stood up, and Harry followed his lead "If you have Harry's letter?" Dumbledore stood up, reached in to his robes and handed Harry his letter. Harry smiled, and nodded his thanks, then looked up at Sirius "Then my nephew and I will be leaving, and you will see us both on the first of September by the Express" Then he gave a slight bow, and the two of them turned and walked out of the conference room.

Chapter 8

Sirius and Harry had almost reached the atrium when they heard a voice behind them.

"Mr Whiteheart, Mr Potter - I was wondering if I might have a word"

They turned to see Dumbledore striding up the passage towards them.

"Be careful" Sirius whispered to Harry "He might seem like a friendly grandfather, but he is one of the smartest and most manipulative wizards alive. If he wants to talk to us alone, it is because he wants something from us and doesn't want Fudge to know" Harry nodded and watched as the Headmaster came closer.

"Headmaster" Sirius said with a nod "How may we help you"

"Could we perhaps talk in private?" Dumbledore gestured towards a room off to their side. Sirius nodded, and the three of them went in to the room. Harry and Sirius sat on one side of the table, whilst Dumbledore sat on the other.

"How may we help you?" Sirius asked again, after a few minutes of silence.

"I merely wanted to ask you to reconsider your position on Harry's safety" Dumbledore said with a smile "Do you believe Voldemort is really dead"

"I don't know" Sirius replied "I would like to think so, but I always was considered an optimist by my friends"

"Can you protect Harry if Voldemort returns"

"Would it be safe to say you have been looking for him - Harry - since Voldemort vanished"

"I have"

"And your social group? The Order, I think it was called"

"They have as well, and I must say you are well informed"

"James trusted me to look after Harry - we had very few secrets" Sirius smiled at Harry "But - to return to your question - if you, The Order and The Ministry have spent ten years looking for my ward, and the first sign you have of him is when we walk up to you to your door and knock" He could not help smiling "I think he is well protected where he is"

"I can provide stronger protections - ones that can not be breached"

"By putting him with muggles who hate him?" Sirius asked with a sneer "James was quite eloquent about his sister in law. And believe me when I say I would rather turn him over to Voldemort than to them" He paused, then added "At least Voldemort would kill him quickly"

"He would be safe. Isn't that your primary concern?" Dumbledore asked, looking at Harry.

"He is safe with me, and will remain so" Sirius said firmly "And he will be loved" He put his hand on Harry's shoulder "If that is all"

"There is one more thing" Dumbledore said, then paused, trying to regain his thoughts "Harry - we have been talking about you, and not to you"

"My Uncle knows me well enough to speak for me. I trust him" Sirius smiled at this.

"So you are happy"

"Yes sir" Harry said promptly "Uncle Michael has looked after me very well"

"And you have had a proper education"

"Yes - I have had a muggle education, made some friends and learned a lot. And Uncle Michael has been teaching me a lot of basic magic - the sort of spells that young witches and wizards are taught before they go to school in America"

"So you think you are ready to go to Hogwarts"

"Yes sir, I believe I am"

"Good" He stood up and turned to leave the conference room, then paused at the door and turned back "I would feel better if I could assign a couple of people to keep you safe"

"Wouldn't that be the job of the DMLE"

"Normally, yes, but since you expressed concern over the make up of the Ministry, and the possibility of Voldemort supporters, I thought you might like two members of The Order"

"Wasn't Sirius Black in The Order?" Harry asked, causing Sirius to snort with laughter. Dumbledore stared at Harry in surprise, but before he could reply Sirius held his hand up.

"Never mind. But these members - would they need to know where we live to guard us"

"They can do it without knowing, but it would be better if they knew"

"And of course you would want to know as well"

"They are under my care, but again it would not be a necessity" He smiled in a friendly manner "And, not to blow my own trumpet, but I am pretty good in a fight - if I know your location, then I can be there in a heartbeat to help" Sirius looked at Harry, and Dumbledore had the strangest feeling that the two of them were communicating in some fashion. A moment later, Sirius turned back.

"Thank you for the offer, but the more people who know, the more chance there is that someone who shouldn't know will find out. And we have managed very well so far" He smiled "If that is all, we should be off"

Dumbledore sat in the room after Sirius and Harry had left, staring at the door. He had been very surprised at the independence Harry had

shown - the remark about Sirius and The Order was entirely unexpected. And the level of devotion he had shown to his guardian was also worrying. Michael Whiteheart had no idea about Harry's importance to the magical world, and no idea of the gamble he was taking by trying to protect him on his own. But Dumbledore knew he couldn't ask The Ministry to force Whiteheart's hand, nor could he do it himself. Whiteheart could take Harry out of the country, and Fudge would do nothing to prevent it. Neither could he - and he couldn't take Harry by force - Whiteheart would never let him and a full scale diplomatic war with America would not be a good thing either.

He decided to bide his time, and wait for Harry to come to Hogwarts. He might have better luck there.

Harry and Sirius returned home, and almost at once they changed their appearances back to Rupert and Aaron. The moving trucks were coming to take them away, and then, a few hours later, would bring them back as Michael and Harry.

"So - what are you going to do about Hermione?" Sirius asked as they waited for the trucks "Are you going to tell her the truth"

"Can I do that?" Harry asked "Wouldn't that put her in danger"

"I don't see why it would. You are going to make friends with her at school"

"If she will let me - yes" Harry said "And I know it sounds like I am full of myself, but if she has the same problems at Hogwarts as she had at St Juliets, then she will need a friend"

"And that has to be you"

"Yes" Harry realised he was blushing, but Sirius had the good grace not to mention it.

"There is another problem you will have to deal with in relation to Hermione"

"And that is"

"She reads a lot, right?" Sirius asked, and took Harry's snort of laughter as a yes "Do you know how many books there are that mention your story"

"So the next time I see her, she will know about The Boy Who Died, and not just Harry"

"Pretty much" Sirius replied "Any idea how you are going to handle that"

"What do you think about her?" Harry asked.

"She's nice. Friendly. And you and she certainly make the past four years a lot of fun" He looked down "Why do you ask"

"Could we invite her her?" He saw the look on his godfather's face "Not now - but maybe in the future. I just got the idea that you were worried about people knowing where we live"

"Some people, but honestly I think we can trust her, and that if you want to be her friend, she will have to learn the truth sooner or later" He smiled down at Harry "You are only eleven years old, and a lot is going to change when you get to Hogwarts. Don't make any big decisions yet, and see how Miss Granger reacts to you when you next see her"

"Okay" Harry smiled, then looked out the window "The trucks are here"

The next four weeks passed in much the same way - Sirius continued Harry's magical education, and even though Harry noticed he was being taught more defensive magic than usual, he didn't mention it, realising that Sirius had his reasons.

He went out a few times, but with a different disguise each time. He saw Hermione out once or twice, but decided to avoid her. He wasn't

quite ready to decide what he would do about her, even though he knew that life without his best friend would be horrible.

The morning of August 31st dawned and Harry woke up, knowing what he was going to do. It was sneaky, underhand and - as Sirius had told him the night before - far more worthy of a Slytherin than a Gryffindor, but he knew he didn't have a choice.

He went downstairs and made breakfast. A few minutes after he started, Sirius came down and sat opposite him. They both ate in silence for a while, then Sirius looked across at him.

"You are going to do it today"

"Yes"

"I can't talk you out of it"

"No"

"Would you like some company"

"Any way I can say no"

"Not really"

"Then yes, I would like some company"

"Okay" Sirius picked up his bowl and put it in the sink "What time"

"About elevenish - she is usually in the park around then"

"Okay" He looked up at the clock, then stood up "I will see you then"

Hermione sat reading in the park. She had done it almost every day since she had come back from Diagon Alley. From the moment she had read her first book - "Muggle Borns And Magic" - she realised that she would be at a major disadvantage in this new world she was

entering, and had resolved to learn as much as she could before she started Hogwarts.

On the last day before school started, she was reading about the fall of Voldemort.

"You realise a lot of that isn't true" A voice came from behind her. She turned, and then stood up in surprise "Before you start, remember I am the same boy you met in Diagon Alley a month ago" He glanced down at the book "And that only four people know the truth about that night, and of those four, two of them are dead, one of them is me and the other is probably not the type to sit for interviews without killing the interviewer"

"Harry!" She smiled "What are you... how are you"

"My guardian moved here a few weeks ago. So I thought I would look around and see what's here. Even though I will be at Hogwarts for most of the year, this will be my home"

"It's nice - I can show you around if you like?" Hermione picked up her book, then looked down at it "What do you mean it isn't true"

"Hermione, there is stuff we have to talk about, but we can do that while you show me around - if the offer is still open?" Hermione nodded, then glanced over at Sirius and raised her eyebrows.

"There is some truth in the book, and my Uncle is a part of it" He looked at Sirius, who smiled "He will be coming with us"

"So, I will see you tomorrow?" Harry said, as he walked her back to her house "We can come over and go to King's Cross together"

"Okay" Hermione said with a smile "See you tomorrow" She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, then turned and went in to her house. Harry turned and walked back down the path to Sirius.

"That went well"

"It seems so" Sirius said with a smile "Do you have anything else to do"

"Nope"

"Then we should go - I have a few more things to teach you before tomorrow, and you should get a good night's sleep" They walked off together, but Harry cast a single glance back at Hermione's house. He had made a friend at Hogwarts, and suddenly starting a new school didn't seem so scary.

Dumbledore was sat alone in his office, thinking about the coming year. Harry's independence could be a problem - and the influence his guardian had over him would certainly need curtailment. Maybe if Harry made friends at school, they would help him see things the way they should be.

If he could sort this out, then his twenty one year battle to correct his biggest mistake would take a big step forward, and bring the end much closer.

He stood up - he had a lot to do and very little time in which to do it.

Hundreds of miles away, Harry - unaware of his role in the future - slept peacefully.